



Top Story: EWU-Idaho Partnership Forged for Child Welfare

With the stroke of a pen on Friday, Feb. 24, a true partnership, unique to Idaho, was formalized as the Idaho Child Welfare Partnership. Dignitaries from Idaho and Washington attended the signing ceremony in Boise to celebrate the collaboration involving the Eastern Washington University School of Social Work, Idaho Department of Health and Welfare Division of Family and Community Services, Casey Family Programs and Boise State University School of Social Work.

"The partnership has set common goals to improve the lives of families and children in Idaho, implement ideas and be open and willing to discuss all relevant issues," said EWU Dean of the School of Social Work Mike Frumkin, who was on hand to sign the partnership agreement.

Eastern's School of Social Work has been building the partnership with the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare (IDHW) for more than a decade. In 1993, an agreement between the two provided stipend-supported, master's of social work-level education for social work students committed to careers in child welfare. Funded by Title IV-E of the Social Security Act, this agency/university agreement brought together two organizations – with similar missions – to improve service to children in the foster care system and their families.

Throughout the next four years, as the partnership flourished and Idaho's population, number of families living below the poverty level and instances of drug abuse grew, both organizations began to explore the potential of reconfiguring the child welfare safety net in preparation for welfare reform. Out of those efforts, the Idaho Child Welfare Research and Training Center (ICWRTC) was established in 1997 in Coeur d'Alene. The ICWRTC partnership between IDHW Division of Family and Community Services and Eastern's School of Social Work jointly seeks improved outcomes for children – with a number of challenges, ranging from adjustment problems to substance abuse to severe mental health issues – and their families.

EWU School of Social Work operates the center, which provides specialized pre-service and continuing education, in-service training, consultation and technical assistance, planning, evaluation and research, utilizing continuous quality improvement and innovative data-driven program development.

"The center became the primary research arm for the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare," Frumkin said. "One of our first projects was the joint writing of a \$6 million federal grant from DSHS (Department of Social and Health Services), which focused on developing a children's mental health service system on a community-by-community basis across the state. Those services are currently being implemented."

Frumkin said Eastern has written a number of grants that led to training caregivers in Idaho who work with children who require out-of-home care, research to determine outcomes for children and families and on-site training.

"We're able to open avenues for federal grants that neither partner could obtain otherwise," Frumkin said.

And that benefits Eastern as well as Idaho.

"The service grant mission of the School of Social Work focuses on the creation of caring, creative and competent practitioners as well as the formation of long-term partnerships with community agencies and advocacy groups to improve the lives of families and children," Frumkin said, "and the ICWRTC provides opportunities for faculty to do research that impacts the lives of Idaho families. We're setting up designs for

assessing and providing outcome-oriented research – research that will provide a basis for continuing quality services. And we are providing an excellently prepared social work professional workforce for the state."

Eastern's Rick Phillips, associate professor of education, serves as the center's children's mental health research director. Diane Davis, professor in Eastern's Master's of Social Work Program, is the substance abuse/child protection researcher for ICWRTC. According to the agreement signed Friday to form the Idaho Child Welfare Partnership, Frumkin will serve on the partnership's administrative board with a university partnership representative, a Family and Community Services administrator, the partnership director, the Casey Family Programs director and the director of the Boise State University School of Social Work, Boise Child Welfare Center.

The Idaho Child Welfare Partnership also includes involvement from a network of sub-contracted universities and colleges, including Northwest Nazarene University, College of Southern Idaho, Idaho State University, Lewis & Clark State College and North Idaho College.